



# That Well Known Christmas Spirit

Mrs. Honeywell drew aside the hanging curtains to place the holly wreath with its red silk bow in the window. Suddenly her front door blew open with a whirl of snow and Edith stomped in, her arms filled with her Christmas bundles.

Edith, tall and rosy-cheeked, clerked in the "big store." She had been taken on as an extra for the holiday rush. The excitement, the crowding of insistent customers, the continuous demand for cheerful service had been her first business experience.

"Hello, Mother bunch!" cried Edith as she closed the door and dropped her bundles, her fur piece and her great coat.

"Are you tired, dear?" asked Mrs. Honeywell, for she knew that this was the last shopping day and she imagined a day of exasperation for her daughter in serving the numberless last-minute folks.

"Not a bit," promptly rejoined Edith. "I do believe that people are following somewhat the muchly advocated saying of doing Christmas shopping early. Of course there were a lot who had to get something for their cousin or a friend or a wife whom they had forgotten, but they seemed to appreciate the fact and were the nicest customers I ever had.

"You know, mother," she went on, "you sort of lose the idea of Christmas when you are in the center of

so much buying and selling. But today I met several customers who were the loveliest I have met."

Edith strolled on out into the kitchen with her mother and helped her with the preparations for supper. Mother and daughter had been "bauling it" together for some years, living on the income from Mr. Honeywell's insurance, which had provided for Edith's education as well as a fair living for both of them. Now, however, Edith felt she should make her own way at least. They needed pretty clothes, she and her mother liked the theatre, and some day they were going to get "that car."

"I have a little surprise for you, mother, or rather the surprise is for me," murmured Edith while she stirred the gravy.

"I thought so," answered her mother. "You've been looking quite mysterious—Look out, you're burning the gravy. I suppose you are going to tell me that Fred will be here tonight?"

"Oh, Fred will be here, all right. He'd be here day and night if I'd let him. But that is not my special surprise," said Edith, as she and Mrs. Honeywell sat down to their gate-legged table.

"I am going to be kept on at the store," Edith continued, "and it all came about on account of a certain

Mrs. Worthington. She came into the china and glassware section and she seemed to be quite put out and annoyed, and told me how she had purchased a nice tea set as a gift for her daughter and the set had been delivered broken, and here it was the last day, with no gift. I sympathized with her and helped her make a new selection and arranged with the floor-man to have the set delivered by a special messenger. It wasn't much for me to do, since it had happened before many times, especially this time of the year, but it seemed to impress Mrs. Worthington. I have since found out that she is one of the most important customers the store has. As soon as I finished with her she went to the buyer of the section and reported to him how I had handled the matter for her and told him that he ought to keep me after the rush. The buyer said he agreed with her and would arrange for me to be employed permanently, and he notified me before I left this evening. So, mother, that settles the job question! And it must have been the Christmas spirit that got into Mrs. Worthington. The other girls told me she had never been known to have a kind word for anyone."

The door bell gave a sharp ring and Edith rose hastily with an eager look in her blue eyes. The next instant Mrs. Honeywell heard a soft murmur:

"Oh, Fred, how cold your nose is!" Whereupon Mrs. Honeywell demanded to know how Edith knew. There was a series of repressed giggles and chuckles as Fred entered and greeted a much loved mother-in-law-to-be.

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## Christmas Dinner

"An old-time Christmas" is an expression that can be used in a relative sense only, when speaking of the celebration of this holiday in the United States. It was not until the very late '50s that keeping Christmas, as it is understood today, could be called a custom of the country. Among the influences that brought about this change were English and German novels, by this time being widely distributed, and the keeping of their old home holiday customs by newly arrived families from Great Britain and Germany. Puritan prejudice was compelled to yield in the matter of the celebration, but refused to give up the place of honor at the Christmas feast to the foreign goose. Turkey, the king of Thanksgiving birds, became the Christmas bird as well.

Fancy plays joyfully with the thought of those bygone days, filling them at will with songs and laughter—the thin tinkle of sleighbells, with the new keen fragrance of pine and fir. There was leisure then for the great gatherings of kindfoks and old friends, plenty of time for story telling, singing and dancing, and the playing of games, the very names of which we know no more.

Those slow-moving days had a flavor, an atmosphere, surely, that shall no more return than the games or the odors of the Christmas feasts over which fancy loves best of all to linger.

It is to be led away by story-book stuff to picture the days just before Christmas as full of the hurry of cooking, to believe the December air laden with the scents of vinegar, fruit, spices. Such things belong to Thanksgiving times. Not a self-respecting housekeeper of 1859 or '60 but had her pound cake and her spice cake packed away in tight boxes, her doughnuts mellowing in high jars, her cranberry "jell" in moulds ready to serve. If a son home from college or a married daughter returned for the holiday wished to recall childhood's memories, he or she must visit the cold, dusky cellar, lift the stone covers from certain brown, deep jars, and inhale the perfume of mince meat packed away for winter's use. Odors of the east were there.

In an outer room, as the returned one well knew, where the air was like that of a refrigerator, were hanging shelves heavy laden with mince pies, baked and frozen, ready to be reheated for Christmas guests and chance visitors. The shelves held besides perfect apples, polished until they shone, and baskets of the finest nuts selected from autumn stores.

The call for dinner comes at last, and excited fancy dashes wildly about trying to paint the scene. Such huge tables as were set and such meals as were spread! In those days they often spoke of their tables as "groaning boards." No wonder. That phrase did not grow out of "thin clear soup" and "crisp head-lettuce" and "leal grapefruit." Ah, no. Such like make no boards groan. Christmas tables in those days bore monster turkeys, stuffed with bread, sage and onions

or with crackers and oysters, baked hams, huge and juicy. There were chicken pies of the kind today known only in dreams. Dishes and dishes and dishes of mashed potatoes, dishes of mashed turnips, baked squash and boiled onions, and there were sweet and sour spiced pickles and purple and ruby and gold jellies and jams and preserves. An unbelievable list.

Benevolent host wielded grand-coffee and added cream and urged more helpings and choice "stuffings." Gracious hostess sat behind grandmother's silver service and poured coffee and added cream and urged the merits of the chicken pie. Sons and daughters and cousins passed everything between whiles of their own eating. Thus they ate and ate, those incredible forefathers of ours, and they talked and talked and laughed and laughed and planned other dinners and lived to eat them.

Then at last came the pie—mince and pumpkin and apple and cherry—and the cakes—pound cake, cream cake, spice cake—and the plum pudding and the doughnuts, and finally the nuts and apples. There is documentary evidence—otherwise no one would believe such dinners ever were.

Women then indulged in the practice, not unknown today, of exchanging favorite recipes. From a cook book of those days of old, quaint enough to satisfy the most exacting story-writer and full of written-in-recipes in d'm brown ink, is taken the appended brief but hair-raising formula that the modern cook may try:

**"MRS. FERRIS' SPONGE COKE**  
 "4 cups of Flour  
 "4 cups of Sugar  
 "9 Eggs  
 "2 tablespoons of Vinegar."